

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of September 22, 1941.
 †"Village Green" opened Wednesday, September 3rd, at Henry Miller's Theatre.
 †"The Wooley" opened Wednesday, September 10th, at the Plymouth Theatre.
 †"Brother Cain" opened Friday, September 12th, at the John Golden Theatre.
 †"The More the Merrier" opened Monday, September 15th, at the Cort Theatre.
 †"Cuckoos on the Hearth" opened Tuesday, September 16th, at the Morosco Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they
originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always
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Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
\$15.00

"Cuckoos on the Hearth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 17, 1941

'Cuckoos on the Hearth,' Craziest Of Mystery Comedies, Good Fun

"Cuckoos on the Hearth," mystery drama by Parker Fennelly. Produced by Brock Pemberton at the Morosco Theatre, New York, Sept. 16, 1941.

★ ★ ★
By BURNS MANTLE

SPEAKING of the escapist drama, here's one. Although there is a touch of poison gas in "Cuckoos on the Hearth," at the Morosco, I'll wager you will think very little about the war, or have any other worry, while you are watching it.

You may feel a little let down when it is over. Producer Pemberton frankly admits that this is a trick mystery play. But while you are watching Antoinette Perry, who directed it, and her players work it out you are going to find it a pretty absorbing business.

"Cuckoos on the Hearth" is a combination of about all the mystery dramas you have seen. Parker Fennelly's set up for it is arbitrary and a little crude.

The Carlises are living in a lonely house in Maine. He sets out for Washington on secret business just as a blizzard sets in at home.

Yes, sir, there is a sanitarium harboring the criminally insane up the road a piece! Yes, ma'am, one of its most dangerous inmates has just escaped!

On With the Thrill

Mr. Carlisle wouldn't think of leaving his pretty wife if, at that moment, a fat and disagreeable novelist, dead as a post except for

his hearing aid, had not arrived and offered himself as temporary protection.

Off goes Carlisle. On come three mysterious strangers. One with a beard who acts like nothing human; one a toughie gangster from New York and one a pretended minister.

What do you suppose they are up to? And which of them, if any, is the escaped stranger? And when will the strangling begin?

Well, you can write your own story after that. Mr. Fennelly has written two—one according to a pattern furnished by the disagreeable novelist, and one in accordance with the records of Harmony Hearth.

Both are acted out. Both are tricky and pretty thrilling. If you are a susceptible auditor. Neither is worth a continental if you want to pull it to pieces and start asking why? I am only telling you that if your idea of going to the theatre is to get away for two hours from the deadly routine of first-page tragedy and apartment house or suburban boredom, here is your chance.

Good Performances

The actors, naturally, have a lot to do with holding the piece together. Howard Freeman, playing the novelist as he imagines Alex Woolcott might have played "The Man Who Came to Dinner," extracts a definite character from his assignment.

Janet Fox is skilful with a comedy line as the familiar dim-witted maid, Percy Kilbride, taking some advantage of a trusting public because he is also playing an actor, has the most fun he has had in quite awhile.

Frederic Tossere, who can wear a beard, or smile, or sneer, or grovel, or command and be a villain still, is a bit conscious this time of his tricks.

Henry Levin is a believable toughie, Howard St. John adds a nice variety of manner and pace to the false clergyman. And Margaret Callahan, I think, made an especially promising impression as the harried wife.

John Root did the setting, and Miss Perry has been successful for once in preventing her nervous players from running away with the play.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, September 17, 1941

"Cuckoos on the Hearth" Opens at the Morosco

Parker Fennelly's New Play a Whodunit Opus, Produced by Brock Pemberton

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE Brock Pemberton is a wryly humorous play producer and slightly pun-shy he neatly pulled the fangs of the aisle-boys at the Morosco last night, when he presented Parker Fennelly's new play, "Cuckoos on the Hearth," by printing a list of alternative titles in the playbill.

Mr. Fennelly's latest "whodunit," Mr. Pemberton explains, may also be called "Two Story House," "Arsenic in Our Town," "The Man Who Came to Stay All Night in the Tavern in Our Town," "Cuckoos in the Corn," and "The Man Who Came to Visit Next Door to the Man Who Came to Dinner."

This gives you a faint idea of the mixture Mr. Fennelly has wrought but I have a title of my own to indicate the rather sedative results. "Brocked in the Cradle of the Deep." For the producer's waggishness in the program scarcely conceals or alleviates the events on the stage.

They may suggest the ingredients of "Our Town," "Arsenic and Old Lace," "The Tavern" and "The Man Who Came to Dinner," but they suggest also that, in making the blend, the author has retained the worst features of each. My own chemical analysis indicated a high percentage of spinach, and other vegetables.

Mr. Fennelly tells the story, in fact two

stories (which is why the play was once called "Two Story House") of Donald Carleton, a young inventor, living in a remote old house in Maine, and working on a new war gas for the U. S. A. He has to go to Washington to see the Government, and just as he is leaving in comes Deputy Sheriff Preble to warn him that a killer has escaped from the State Asylum up the road.

Next comes a blowy, balloon-tired gentleman with a slightly soprano voice, horn rimmed spectacles and a set of nasty cracks. He is an author of mystery stories, totally deaf, except when he plugs in his ear-sockets, and he insists he rented a room from the

young couple in June, though a blizzard is raging outside. Hearing his country's call, and in spite of everything, Mr. Carleton leaves for Washington.

He is no sooner out of the house than in come three peculiar fellows carrying a large, long box which they say contains the Indian chief member of a medicine show in an hypnotic trance. Mrs. Carleton and Lulu Pung, a batty cousin of Mr. Carleton, go up to what they hope is a good night's sleep. They should have had my seat.

Well, a lot of things happen, and it is all according to the mystery author's invented story. Then at the end of the second act the storekeeper out of "Our Town," who is a sort of interlocutor, told the audience he would show what actually took place, and intimated that money, a set of dishes, or some bottles of strong drink would be given the play-goer for something or other. The dishes were on display in the foyer, and I suspect the neatest trick will be to exhibit the play-goer.

What really happened was a lot better than the made-up story, but I must confess that I had, by that time, after a dawdling first act, and a tedious second one, lost most of my interest in the proceedings. Mr. Fennelly has thought up some slick twists to his story, and produced a couple of surprises. Some of the dialogue, notably about the Man Who Came to Drink Arsenic and Old Patchwork is cleverly written, but the total effect is a hedge-podge, much too overdone, and wearisome in its details. The Nazi spy plot has its moments of real excitement, and the trick ending is smart enough to deserve a better play to tag on to.

Under Antoinette Perry's direction the acting is generally excellent and there are good performances by Margaret Callahan, Carleton, Young, George Mathews and Frederic Tossere. Howard Freeman makes the most of the high pitched author, in a sly burlesqued performance, and Percy Kilbride works wonders with the rich part of a Down East sheriff who turns out . . . but then I shall keep the plot's chief secret.

Critics, I suppose, like dead plays, should tell no tales.

"Cuckoos on the Hearth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 17, 1941

'Cuckoos on the Hearth,' Melodrama-Burlesque, Opens at Morosco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE is a lethal gas chamber in last evening's "Cuckoos on the Hearth" and homicidal mania, to say nothing of spies, people hopping out of mysterious chests armed to the teeth and hints of leprosy. Parker W. Fennelly, the author of this threatening concoction, which tenants the Morosco, has done things up brown. In case none of these elements suffices, Mr. Fennelly has tossed in burlesque and a pinch of parody.

It's hard to tell what playwrights will think of next, particularly when they are thinking longingly of the success of "Arsenic and Old Lace." Mr. Fennelly has

thought of a lonely house in Maine in the midst of a snowstorm. He has thought of a narrator out of "Our Town" and a visiting novelist out of "The Man Who Came to Dinner." (The parody here is overt, if not particularly comical.) The methods of Pirandello have occurred to him, so that a third of the play is not what did happen, but what might have happened. This provides him with what amounts to two second acts.

In the first of them, which describes events as the novelist imagined them, one of the chief menaces is a mad physician, another is a clergyman who is not what he seems, and the heroine gets strangled. In the other, the physician is a spy, and the clergyman

even less clerical, and the homicidal maniac is the last person you would suspect, unless, of course, you are trained to the older school of mystification and always suspect the least suspicious. In this version the heroine is rescued by her loving husband and the secret of a new war gas is preserved for home defense.

Not being entirely sure which of these versions, if either, Mr. Fennelly wanted us to believe, I compromised by believing neither. Neither is, of course, altogether seriously meant. But neither is in itself quite preposterous enough to be wholly comical, and I

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, September 17, 1941

Down East Whimsey

By HOWARD BARNES

NOT content with one ending for a melodramatic whimsey, the author of "Cuckoos on the Hearth" has written two. You pay your money and you take your choice of alternate second acts. As unfolded at the Morosco last evening, both of them seemed equally garrulous and equally lean on humor and horror. Without the engaging presence of Percy Kilbride in one of those bits that he always makes into a major performance, the show would be dull indeed. Thanks to his acting and several pleasant supporting players, it has a few moments of merriment and excitement.

Perhaps I should explain the double-barreled action of this Parker W. Fennelly concoction more explicitly. A round writer, who might possibly be considered a caricature of Alexander Woolcott, descends on a Maine family during a blizzard. The head of the house is off to Washington to discuss a gas formula he has perfected. Before long his house is infested with three other interlopers lugging a suspicious looking box. Meanwhile

a maniac is supposed to be loose in the neighborhood.

Why this tiny dramatic set-up warranted two denouements is something of a mystery. In the first second act, you are shown what the writing fellow cooked up in his bedroom, using the various characters as figures in a murder thriller. The second second act, as a commentator in the "Our Town" tradition explains, is what really happened in the snow-bound mansion. The device might well have been carried on for any number of second

'CUCKOOS ON THE HEARTH'

A play in three acts, by Parker W. Fennelly; directed by Antoinette Perry; setting by John Root; presented at the Morosco Theater on September 16, 1941, by Brock Pemberton. The cast:
Amos Rodick.....Walter O. Hill
Lulu Fung.....Janet Fox
Charlotte Carlton.....Margaret Callahan
Donald Carlton.....Carleton Young
Sheriff Preble.....Percy Kilbride
Zadoc Grimes.....Howard Freeman
"Doc" Ferris.....George Mathews
The Professor.....Frederic Tosere
The Rev. Dr. Clarence Underhill
Howard St. John
Peck.....James Coats
Dr. Gordon.....Henry Levin
A State Trooper.....Arthur Hughes

fear the author has fallen among his too numerous stools. His melodrama is slowly paced and farfetched; his burlesque merely makes the whole evening seem a little silly. We'll have to mark "Cuckoos on the Hearth" down as an overly elaborate trick which doesn't manage to come off.

Percy Kilbride is in it, and the presence of Mr. Kilbride always insures against the complete waste of an evening. Mr. Kilbride being mighty funny under all circumstances. Howard Freeman is generally amusing in his parody of Monty Woolley's parody. Frederic Tosere is immaculately menacing and this department has no quarrel with any of the other actors. As for Mr. Fennelly, he's evidently been spending too much time in the theater. It's got him all confused.

acts. This spectator was good and tired of the whole business, long before the variations on a dull theme commenced.

No play can be utterly without merit when Kilbride is around. As a deputy sheriff, with a Down East accent, he almost makes it worth while to sit through the second ending of "Cuckoos on the Hearth." Even the absurdities of the role do not stump him. Cocky and a bit querulous, he wrings all of the amusement that he can out of stock scenes. He even springs the melodrama into some sort of tension for the climax. Janet Fox has a bit of fun with the role of a Yankee old maid, and Frederic Tosere, Howard St. John and George Mathews are just what you expect them to be, as German spies, musing through a Maine snowstorm to steal the gas formula.

The usually astute Brock Pemberton has not only chosen unwisely, I believe, in putting on "Cuckoos on the Hearth," but he hasn't helped much with his production. The general mood of the show falls somewhere between a straightforward shocker and a satire on various theatrical exhibits. A program note, for example, lists as alternative titles: "Two Story House," "Arsenic in Our Town," "The Man Who Came to Stay All Night in the Tavern in Our Town," etc. The present title could scarcely be worse. Antoinette Perry has made a brave try to give the piece a lift in her direction, but the confusion of moods and the poverty of comedy and action have left her and the cast baffled for most of the time.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 17, 1941

Give Us Crickets On Our Hearth

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF ANYTHING known to dramaturgy has been left out of *Cuckoos on the Hearth*, it's clearly an oversight. Mr. Fennelly's "shudder comedy" is a kind

of Omnibus of the American Theater, but with all the pages inserted in the wrong order. In it melodrama, farce and burlesque touse one another almost beyond recognition, and so much happens that it would take longer than the play will run to set it all down. And after you had set it all down, you still would be faced with the job of trying to add it all up.

To tackle the melodrama first, it's one of those plays that takes place in a spooky house on a lonely road in the middle of the night at the height of a snowstorm. There's a secret weapon for national defense involved, and some Nazi agents, and a goofy Down East spinster, and an escaped maniac. Add to this some assorted revolvers, flashlights, handcuffs, poisoned drinks and lethal chambers and you have the "shudder" half of the proceedings.

As for the comedy half, there's a drawing commentator borrowed from *Our Town*. There's a fat and mean-tongued writer last observed in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

There's more than a touch of *The Taverne*, and some cheerful plagiarism from *Arsenic and Old Lace*. There's also the little trick of first telling what didn't happen and then what did, which accounts for Act II and Act III, respectively; not to speak—and it would be much better not to speak—of various witticisms rigged up in the program and the Morosco lobby.

The results of all this are highly unfortunate. There is one authentic moment of horror, and there are some scattered laughs, but for the most part Mr. Fennelly's tricks are neither unnerving nor comical. Though *Arsenic and Old Lace* proved that it can be done, it is still extremely difficult to make horror and humor tell. Too much of *Cuckoos on the Hearth* is slow or silly or uninspired; and in gaily borrowing from Thornton Wilder, Daniel Kroeber, George M. Cohan and Kaufman and Hart, Mr. Fennelly too often forgot to borrow their talent.

The cast was uneven, but Percy Kilbride, George Mathews, Janet Fox and Howard Freeman did as well with their parts as any one had a right to expect.

"Cuckoos on the Hearth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 17, 1941

"Cuckoos on the Hearth" Mad Mystery at the Morosco

By WILLELLA WALDORF

BROCK PEMBERTON, Antoinette Perry and Parker W. Fennelly have assembled at the Morosco Theatre all of the ingredients from past mystery plays that they could remember at the moment, called the result "Cuckoos on the Hearth," and dared the audience to object.

"Any similarity to any person, character, play, situation or gag, living or dead, is intentional," says a program note. "Anyone feeling aggrieved is referred to Milton R. Weinberger, attorney, 1440 Broadway."

"Cuckoos on the Hearth" begins with the ancient warning that a homicidal maniac has just escaped from an asylum fifteen miles upstate and is headed toward Harmony Hearth, home of Donald and Charlotte Carlton near Cuddybend, Maine.

Of course the worst blizzard of the season is raging without.

Furthermore, Donald Carlton has invented a new gas for use in wartime, and is off to Washington at the urgent request of High Authority.

Subsequent arrivals include Zadoc Grimes, a Woolcottian writer of mystery tales; a bearded German, a fellow dressed as a clergyman, and a New York thug.

Two Solutions

The second act designed for screaming pur-

poses, drags in nearly everything, even a dash of leprosy, and then out comes old Amos Rodick, who runs the general store at Cuddybend, with the news that this isn't what really happened that night at all, merely what Grimes wrote in his book.

The actors then go back to the beginning of the Night of Horror and show what really did happen. It involves German spies and is nearly as improbable as what went before.

The big question, of course, is the identity of the escaped maniac, whose hobby is strangling defenseless females while he reels off excerpts from the works of Omar Khay-

yam. The truth, when finally revealed, turns out to be quite a surprise.

All this is generally well performed by a capable cast, with especially humorous contributions by Howard Fresman as the obese author, Janet Fox as Lulu Pung, who pines to wear a grass skirt and become a Hula dancer; and Percy Kilbride as Sheriff Preble. Margaret Callahan, the heroine of the piece, sounds off with some blood-curdling shrieks at intervals and last night's audience made plenty of noise on its own account at the more hair-raising moments.

Valuable Prizes

We shouldn't be at all surprised if Mr. Pemberton gets away with all this for a while. After all, there's nothing an audience at a mystery play likes better than an opportunity to shriek, and there are some thoroughly terrifying moments in "Cuckoos on the Hearth." It is unfortunate that playing the second act over again tends to become a bit wearisome after a time, but there is generally enough going on to hold the interest, and some of the comedy is very merry indeed.

In the foyer old Amos Rodick's general store was visible and members of the audience were invited, as they went out, to seal their seat stubs in envelopes provided by the management and express an opinion on the relative merits of the two solutions.

"You can win money!" proclaimed the notices. "Whiskey, a set of dishes and other valuable prizes."

By this means, of course, Mr. Pemberton hopes to lure into the Morosco a horde of movie fans who have hitherto shunned the legitimate theatre on artistic grounds. Now that it is possible to win a set of dishes at a play as well as at a film, their opinion of the drama as a medium of expression is expected to improve almost overnight.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

Enjoyed when first received—

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An Excellent Gift Solution

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"Cuckoos on the Hearth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 17, 1941

Killers Are on the Loose in Cuckoos on the Hearth

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH, like any other producer, Brock Pemberton may make his occasional mistakes about plays, he is a wise man. He knows that the best way to silence criticism is to anticipate it. Accordingly, he has seen to it that the program for *Cuckoos on the Hearth* should chirp before the critics can.

The playbill at the Morosco lets down its back hair on the subject of Parker W. Fennelly's farcical mystery drama. It does its amiable best to make reviewing unnecessary by snatching the words right off a reviewer's typewriter before he can pound them out.

Gaily it warns that any similarity to any person, character, play, situation or gag, living or dead, is intentional. Proudly it maintains that anyone feeling aggrieved by *Cuckoos on the Hearth* is referred to Milton R. Weinberger, attorney, 1440 Broadway; an offer which some of us may yet take up. Not stopping there the program even gets around to suggesting such richly descriptive alternative titles for Mr. Fennelly's hocus-pocus as *Arsenic in Our Town*, *The Man Who Came to Stay All Night in the Tavern in Our Town*, *Cuckoos in the Corn* and *The Man Who Came to Visit Next Door to The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

Although these are as helpful as the critical frenzy have a right to expect managerial suggestions to be, and may even shed some much-needed light on the mixed na-

ture of Mr. Fennelly's thriller, a more accurate alternative title for *Cuckoos on the Hearth* would be *Seven Keys to Mr. Pemberton's Baldpate*. For Mr. Cohan's contribution to the evening should not be overlooked. Neither for that matter, alas, can Father Damien's be.

Mr. Fennelly has set himself the task of relating what happens in an inventor's supposedly quiet, country home in Maine when, on a snowy night, an insane killer is reported at large, and in the neighborhood are several other queer fellows, including a writer of detective yarns who bears a suspicious resemblance to Sheridan Whiteside (or should I say a certain Dr. Woolcott, Mr. Weinberger?).

Needless to say, mischief is abroad, even

if, instead of speeding on its bloody way, it often seems to have chosen as its means of transportation either a litter or a dromedary without a date. What the evening's mischief dawdles about in is a melodrama which, so far as theatrical memories are concerned, proves to be a *Golden Treasury* of plays brought together without benefit of Paigrove, Thornton Wilder's *Stage Manager* is on hand to preside over the chest from Arsenic and Old Lace, the wind machine from *The Tavern*, Mr. Cohan's keying at Baldpate, a fellow without a wheelchair who does more than suggest *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and enough gags and wheezes from various mystery plays to fill a whole program of information. Please with questions as to their origins.

Antoinette Perry has directed this deliberate potpourri with unctious. In it Percy Kilbride gives the best performance of his career—and an admirable one it is—as a casual Down-East sheriff. Frederic Tozere is malign in his familiar, suave way. Janet Fox has her humorous moments as a light-witted maiden who fancies herself as an Italian dancer; Carleton Young and Margaret Callahan make an agreeable young couple, the inventor of war gases and his wife, and Howard Freeman handles the Woolcottian gibes with a proper relish for words and insults.

But the plan, in spite of one grand, spine-twisting moment in its second act, and some amusing surprises in its third, emerges more as a disappointing anthology of hokum than it does as a satisfactory melodrama. Its beginnings are hopelessly slow, and its leprous interludes unfortunate. Although it is better than the no less addled *The More the Merrier*, which opened the night before, Mr. Fennelly's concoction makes one long for a thriller that is neither insane nor spoofed. Some of us just like our murders straight. We would rather have our vertebrae out of joint than our tongues in our cheeks.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 17, 1941

'Cuckoos on the Hearth' Continues Week's Tradition of Crime Dramas With Frivolous Manners

By BROOKS ATKINSON

GOOD Lord, we're surrounded! On Monday night "The More the Merrier" hit murder over the head with a funny-bone at the Cort Theatre. Last evening "Cuckoos on the Hearth" played a few pranks on crime at the Morosco Theatre. At the current moment, it is not exactly clear what Parker W. Fennelly was getting at when he wrote this drama of illegal doings in a lonely house snowbound in the State of Maine. But a defeated playgoer is willing to guess that he was not getting at what he got.

For "Cuckoos on the Hearth" is a rag-bag of odds and ends from the crime and comedy counters. It mixes up maniacal horrors and Nazi espionage with a tart suggestion of "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and it regularly offers you two widely assorted conclusions. But it must be confessed that none of these things is much of an improvement upon a competently written saga of transgression and the spirit of friskiness hovering over the production sounds like a desperate afterthought.

For one thing we can all be profoundly grateful. Percy Kilbride acts a character part to perfection. Mr. Kilbride is the hawk-nosed actor with the high nasal voice, who has been dropping bits of comedy into plays for years.

Last season he turned up to every one's delight as the obliging but temperamental hired man in "George Washington Slept Here." Early in "Cuckoos on the Hearth" he appears in a snow-covered maskinaw as a Down East deputy sheriff, and he appears again in the last act in circumstances which this column, operating under the usual Broadway censorship, is not permitted to divulge. But Mr. Kilbride contributes no routine rube caricature to this higgledy-piggledy drama. He tricks it out with innumerable little touches of friendship, prudishness and bloodless bravado—a beautiful little job of acting. Although Mr.

Kilbride has always taken his work seriously, put this down as the gem of his career.

In the beginning "Cuckoos on the Hearth" is the reasonable story of a young inventor who has cooked up a gas useful for nations temporarily interested in war. On a snowy evening he is called to Washington to consult with a talkative government. As soon as you have digested a sensible beginning, a magniloquent writer and wit turns up to write a mystery story in an adjoining room; and as soon as he is out of the way, three special lugs come in with a box big enough to hold a body. What goes on afterward is between Mr. Fennelly and the cash customers. This column will be content to remark that the second ending to the drama is a good deal less boring than the first.

But what about this garrulous and crossly whimsical writer? Who is he? He is Zadoc Grimes in the program. But he is Woolcott in every other respect. Since Mr. Woolcott has just stepped out of the city for the moment, Howard Freeman plays the part with a bulging stomach, beaming spectacles, an extraordinary dressing gown and a stream of conversation extending from here to there. Particularly in the last act, when the play is at sixes and sevens, Mr. Aldoc Woolgrimes is pretty amusing in a scene that has nothing to do with anything else. And if Mr. Freeman has never played the part of the wheel-chair monster in "The Man Who Came to Dinner," he is the only actor and author in America with a clean record.

The cast of "Cuckoos on the Hearth" also includes Janet Fox, who plays a sex-starved country maiden with considerable fresh humor; Margaret Callahan, Frederic Tozere, Howard St. John, George Mathews, Carleton Young and Walter O. Hill, who is a sort of bucolic commentator. But what they are able to accomplish is grievously encumbered by the play.

"The More the Merrier"

Reprinted from THE NEW YORK TIMES, September 16, 1941

'The More the Merrier,' a Madcap Murder Farce With Multiple Doors, in Three Acts, Makes Its Bow at the Cort Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF Olsen and Johnson had not already earmarked "Crazy House" as a title, Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus would have just the right caption for their new farce, "The More the Merrier," which was slammed around the stage of the Cort last evening. It is a new farce in point of fact, but it is an old farce in all the stage essentials. With the connivance of Stewart Chaney, the scene designer, the authors have set up a living room with a balcony and enough doors for a chase at high speed. In ancient times, when the Marx boys were in fine stage fettle, that used to be enough for an uproarious evening. Apparently it still is, to judge by the laughter in the theatre last evening, although this column must respectfully dissent and describe "The More the Merrier" as a pretty labored joggle of the funny-bone.

Once Mr. Gabrielson and Mr. Pincus get out their sliderule and put pencil to paper, they are dogged fellows who never let go. In the beginning they offer you Louis Hector as a rich man in his own castle, snarling with political ambition, and J. C. Nugent, a Senator who is abetting him. Time out for a couple of good lines: "There is nothing like charity to take the stink out of a rich man," says Mr. Nugent, who also remarks, apropos

of something else: "I'm a politician and can't afford to keep my word."

You will not be interested in the details of how the authors get the rich man and the Senator out of the castle and how they fill it with automobile tourists for the night. All that matters is that the body of a murdered man gets mixed up somehow in the general bedlam and is tossed from one room to another until closing time. Writing strictly according to formula, the authors ring every change they can on the farce situation until the actors fall down exhausted.

This sort of hugger-mugger is either funny

or not, according to taste. Some of it is obviously funny and some of it is well acted by experienced comedians. For Millard Mitchell of the big ears and the slow-witted expression is present in the part of a stupid felon and pint-size Teddy Hart gives off occasional comic screams and waves his hands in frantic excitement. Doro Merande represents spinster's apprehension with dead-pan humor. Best of all is Keenan Wynn, who has been a likable young actor for some time, but who now blossoms out as a full-grown comedian. As an impulsive fix-it from the East he knows what to do with his hands, his eyes and his voice in every situation and never lets his part drift away into pointless generalities. Since Keenan Wynn is the son of the illustrious Ed you naturally expect him to know something about the business. But you might not expect him to be an original actor with no trace of his father's memorable mannerisms. It is obvious that he is not only willing but able to stand on his own feet.

It would be a good thing if "The More the Merrier" and the performance of it had half as much easy assurance. But the authors have pinned it together with thumb-tacks and the performance is desperately heavy-handed. Whatever jokes there may be in the farcial situations of the play are clubbed to death in the performance. Dr. Preminger has used the biggun more effectively than the snapstick in the direction.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 16, 1941

'The More the Merrier,' Farce in a Hurry, Opens at the Cort Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"THE MORE THE MERRIER," or, the Case of the Comical Corpse, was played with commendable gusto last evening at the Cort Theater. Everybody moved very rapidly around the Cort's stage, doors were popped into and out of violently and an oddly acrobatic cadaver was wheeled back and forth on roller skates. The audience was convulsed. This department, to introduce a subjective note, was more tepidly amused.

Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus have "invented the action of "The More the Merrier." They suppose a mansion in Colorado, temporarily abandoned by its dotting master to the mercies of a press

agent and a couple of writers. They suppose a snowstorm, a need for cash on the part of the momentary custodians, and a startling influx of tourists looking for clean beds. They suppose that one of a busload has been conked on the head by Teddy Hart and has,

to the consternation of Mr. Hart and Millard Mitchell, failed to survive the ordeal. And then—

Well, having contrived this situation, Mr. Gabrielson and Mr. Pincus go wild over it. Twenty or thirty people, career around the

stage, the body appears and disappears and goes skating, the rightful owner of the mansion returns and is suspected of murder, a woman afflicted with hotel kleptomania steals the evidence, a daffy artist paints mustaches on all available objects. Mr. Hart and Mr. Mitchell try to carry Louis Hector on a stretcher and drop him, and love flourishes amid discomforts. One would think offhand that Mr. Gabrielson and Mr. Pincus have imagined all possible complications.

It seems ungrateful to report, amid all this happy confusion, that the authors fail to achieve a really topnotch farce because they aren't inventive enough. Ignoring all else, they put their trust in the comedy of body shifting and to that devote almost all their play. A certain lack of variety results; a feeling that the plot is on a treadmill, running anxiously without progress. There are funny spots, but little that is really unexpected—nothing that brings you out of the seat with a whoop. Grade A farce has a higher whoop content than "The More the Merrier," which is just sort of comical.

Nobody could blame the actors, all of whom are energetic and most of whom are able. Mr. Hector and J. C. Nugent are an amusing pair of politicians on the make; Frank Albertson, Grace McDonald and Keenan Wynn are engaging young lovers in bad trouble; Mr. Hart is as funny as always and Mr. Mitchell has never yet let a part down and is in fine form here. Otto L. Preminger has urged these and the dozens of others to play at a gallop. But the production outruns the play.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 16, 1941

What Will They Think of Next?

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"THE MORE THE MERRIER" is one of those insane farces with so much plot that it would be pointless, even if it were possible, to summarize it. It's

about a man who wants to be Governor of Colorado, and what goes on in his red-plaster castle in the Rockies on a snowy night when his press agent turns the place into a hotel in order to raise the cash to get to Denver. It's about a busload of people who take rooms for the night—old maids with dogs and young men with portable radios and souvenir-hunters with shopping-bags; and most of all it's about a corpse that is hustled off the bus and into the house and transferred from one bedroom to another. There is no need, after all, to go into detail.

Particularly since the show, though sprinkled with laughs and for one short stretch smothered with them, can't quite cope with its own insanity. This is the point where it is customary for the reviewer to wish that George Abbott had been around to direct, but I rather imagine it would have been the same story if he had. There's nothing very wrong with Mr. Preminger's direction, and the cast—made up of such people as

Teddy Hart, Millard Mitchell, Frank Albertson and Keenan Wynn—are as bright and lively as they come, and all George Abbott alumni to boot.

The main trouble is the usual trouble: Completely wacky farces, to succeed, have to go at a terrific pace, have to get their real laughs from something funny in the situations, have to seem original enough not to invite reminiscences, and can't depend on mere noise and nonsense, or even very good on straight wisecracking. When "The More the Merrier" goes into action near the end of the second act, and conspirators duck in and out of doors while the corpse sails by on roller-skates and the old maid keeps summing up the works, everything is just what it should be.

But the rest of the time, the authors too often merely toss in gags, or resort to tricks that go way back beyond George Abbott to George Cohan, or think a story will move because the characters do. The show just doesn't have enough spin to it. Some of it is too slow, some of it is too slight, and a great deal of it is too mechanical.

"The More the Merrier"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 16, 1941

Scrambling Actors Chasing Clues Get "More the Merrier"

"The More the Merrier," a farce comedy by Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus. Produced by Otto L. Preminger and Norman Pincus at the Cort Theatre, New York, Sept. 15, 1941.



By BURNS MANTLE

THE wonder is not that the authors of "The More the Merrier" at the Cort have selected the familiar mistaken hotel theme to write a new farce around. The wonder is that an experienced fellow like Otto Preminger would decide that it was worth another stage try.

Yet here it is, fitted out in a heavy rusty gold setting by Stewart Chaney and played by a numerous and, I suspect, fairly expensive cast.

Also it is to be reported that last night's first audience, which was at least a third professional, found it pretty funny, laughing heartily when the married innocents put the corpse in the old maid's room.

Laughing even more heartily, too, when they put roller skates on the stiff, so they could move it around with greater ease and added speed. That was a new touch.

Personal Bias

But for me the mistaken hotel farce is about as hard to take as most mistaken identity farces. I have to believe in them at least a little.

When they tell me a nationally famous newspaper tycoon, living in a castle in the Rocky Mountains, went away in search of a gubernatorial nomination, was grounded on

his own aviation field, and came home to find his castle chock ablock with comic tourists dumped off in a snowstorm, I do not accept the story gracefully, nor laugh easily.

Not even with Millard Mitchell and Teddy Hart playing a couple of worried crooks who believe they have murdered a man and are trying to get rid of the body before the bus trip is resumed.

There are, however, some good reports to be brought from the Cort this morning. Keenan Wynn is playing one of his first farce roles and doing it rather better than the average young comedian. His comedy has the light,

"THE MORE THE MERRIER"

A farce in three acts, by Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus; directed by Otto L. Preminger; setting by Stewart Chaney; presented at the Cort Theatre on September 15, 1941, by Mr. Preminger and Norman Pincus. The cast: Miss Craig.....Dorrit Kelton
Harvey Royal.....Louis Hector
Senator Broderick.....J. C. Nugent
Jackson.....Herbert Duffy
Drivers.....Robert Gray
Daniel Finch.....Frank Albertson
Bugs Saunders.....Grace McDonald
Joseph Dolma.....Keenan Wynn
Mrs. Cartwright.....John McKee
Mrs. Cartwright.....Mrs. Priestly Morrison

Bus Driver.....Scott Moore
Mrs. Keek.....Lucia Seger
Lucille Keek.....Brenda Struck
Fat Man.....Ralph Chambers
Young Man with a radio.....Saint Subber
Mr. Jupiter.....Max Beck
Minister Man.....Jack Riano
Miss Hogben.....Doro Merande
Al Goblin.....Teddy Hart
Harry Scavvis.....Millard Mitchell
George Smith.....Will Geer
Forrest Lockhart.....John Barne
Capt. James.....Lee Frederick
First State Trooper.....James Albert
Second State Trooper.....Guy Samped
Mr. Dewey.....Jane Standish
Mrs. Dewey.....G. Albert Smith
Doc Strube.....

spontaneous quality that suggests something of his father's creative gift. And he can employ it without the effort seeming strained. He seemed to me the most believable of the complication builders last night.

Frank Albertson and Grace McDonald were engagingly young and eager as a pair of publicity folk. Louis Hector wastes a superior talent playing briefly as the owner of the castle. J. C. Nugent is also lost in a shadowy part and the bits employ a variety of veterans, including Mrs. Priestly Morrison, John McKee, Doro Merande and G. Albert Smith.

Jack Riano does remarkably well as the dead man, doubling as an acrobat when the plot demands that he should be tossed from a balcony twelve or fifteen feet above stage level.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, September 16, 1941

'More the Merrier' Presented at Cort

Teddy Hart and Millard Mitchell Play Principal Roles in Wacky Comedy

By JOHN ANDERSON

THERE were so many players employed to illustrate the title of "The More the Merrier" at the Cort last night that any adverse report on the proceedings is bound to seem a little like attacking the WPA. The duplex stage was crowded with goofy characters; a corpse was tossed around, and even put on roller skates in the interest of good, clean fun, yet somehow things were never quite as fast and as furious as the farce intended.

The new play has its amusing moments, but they are so far apart that you could almost hit the high spots by walking around the block and dropping in on them from time to time to see how they are doing. That way leaves you practically on the way home.

For Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus have worked up a plot gag which ought to be good for an uproarious evening among the more indoor screwballs, but which never quite makes Grade A foolishness, and almost never touches Grade B suspense. Since it is a murder farce these are serious defects.

One trouble is that the authors have put so many wacky characters on the stage that nothing seems to make much sense. They get in one another's way, and in the way of the plot so that there were moments when I felt

I was trying to elbow my way through a crowd to see what was going on.

Most of them arrive at Harvey Royal's Castle in the Colorado Rockies in a snowbound bus on the notion that the huge house is a tourist home. Mr. Royal, a candidate for Governor, is on his way to Denver and to get a little ready cash his press agents take in the misguided tourists only to discover that they have made matters worse, much, much worse. There's a dead man in the back of the bus, and his murderer is obviously among the miscellaneous guests.

Amatory Angle

You would not wish me to tell you about the love story, which seems too silly even for the authors' words, but perhaps you would like to know that the big politician returns home unexpectedly, finds his castle a tourists stop-over, heaves the corpse off his bed with the idea he is dealing with a drunken bum, and then finds himself charged with murder by the prosecutor who is opposing his election.

It is all too complicated to mention, but somehow the authors straighten everything out at 10:50 o'clock, tie up all the clues in a somewhat untidy little package, and call it a play. It is, I suspect, largely their fault that I did not care, by then, which one of the steadily idiotic suitors the irrelevant young lady married, or who was elected Governor of Colorado, or even who the deceased gentleman was they bounced so amiably around the stage.

Some good farceurs are responsible for the acting and the ever reliable Teddy Hart and Millard Mitchell get the best of it. Keenan Wynn, son of the great Ed, emerges as a genuine comic, a little uncertain still and a trifle too expansive in a part that tempts him to run away with it.

A sharper director than Dr. Preminger would have persuaded him, I daresay, to resist the temptation, but then a sharper director than Dr. Preminger would probably have cleared the stage of the clutter now and then just for emphasis, and changed the pace for the sake of variety.

Amusing Snapshots

Louis Hector and J. C. Nugent present some amusing snapshots of big politicians, and Will Geer gets some dry humor out of a last act prosecutor. Grace McDonald is pleasant to look at, even when trying to appear distraught, and Doro Merande, forever remembered for her portrait of the prolific ookie in "Love's Old Sweet Song," makes the most of a jittery spinster, for a welcome change.

Stewart Chaney has devised a grotesquely feudal castle to shelter a drama whose real home is probably a deserted cuckoo clock.

"The More the Merrier"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 16, 1941

"The More the Merrier" New Farce at the Cort Theatre

By WILLELLA WALDORF

AFTER the multiple murders in "Arsenic and Old Lace," a farce with only one corpse in it is bound to seem relatively tame, but the authors of "The More the Merrier," presented last night at the Cort Theatre, stir up a certain amount of excitement by dressing up their corpse in roller skates and murdering him not once but twice.

The rather mild first act is devoted to explaining that Harvey Royal, millionaire, has aspirations to become Governor of Colorado, and that his press agent has been unavoidably detained in hospital by an appendicitis operation. Daniel Finch, the press agent's youthful assistant, turns up as substitute and is joined by Bugs Saunders and Joseph Dolma, a couple of writers from the East, expected to aid in putting over the Royal campaign.

Murder in the Rockies

Unfortunately lacking ready cash, the three of them rent out the rooms in Mr. Royal's red-pink castle in the Rockies to a bus-load of travelers marooned in a blizzard, and the corpse is discovered on the bus. The frantic efforts to get the body off Royal property, and the inevitable return of Mr. Royal himself at

the worst possible moment serve to keep things moving in the second act, while a steady stream of oddities pours in and out of the Royal bed-rooms in night attire. It is, apparently, the impression of the Messrs. Gabrielson and Pincus that most bus passengers are either crooked or crazy.

The crooked element is chiefly represented by Al Goblin and Harry Scavvis, a Mutt and Jeff couple played with their customary zeal by Teddy Hart and Millard Mitchell, who have been bolstering up faltering farces for years. This time most of their efforts are directed

against Keenan Wynn, who gives an uncommonly skillful performance as the inventive Mr. Dolma. Doro Merande adds to the merriment as a lady who must take her dog, Gomez, out for his nightly walk, a blizzard or no blizzard, while Grace McDonald and Frank Albertson, among the few moderately sane persons in the company, handle the love interludes pleasantly. Miss McDonald, hitherto known as a dancer in musical comedy, makes her debut in what is called the drama with ease. In the horde clamoring about the stage Will Geer brings on a good character impression of a prosecuting attorney with an eye for politics, and G. Albert Smith has his moments as a bemused coroner. Louis Hector as Mr. Royal and J. C. Nugent as his henchman, the Senator, find little to do but act bewildered and bluster.

An Acrobatic Corpse

"The More the Merrier" is no "Arsenic and Old Lace," but it works up a good many highs and some suspense in the second act and resolves everything in the third with as much inventiveness as the average mystery. It boasts, furthermore, enough giddy characters here and there to lend a certain amount of novelty to a hard-worked and somewhat hackneyed plot. As the first madhouse murder farce of the new season, it ought to provide a merry evening for the not-over-fussy. Obviously enough, the members of the cast is Jack Riano, who plays the corpse. His fall from the balcony—on roller skates—is an impressive acrobatic stunt. Of course he's already dead at the time.

The accent throughout is on laughter rather than horror. The major horror of the evening is provided by Stewart Chaney, the scenic designer, who has obligingly made a terrible thing of Mr. Royal's Rocky Mountain Castle.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 16, 1941

The More the Merrier Is an Energetic Farce

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WHEN they called their new farce "The More the Merrier," Frank Gabrielson and Norman Pincus did more than find a title for it. They made a clean breast of their methods of operation. In culinary circles does not farce as verb mean "to stuff with forcemeat"? Well, having seized upon a situation which if properly prepared might have been very funny indeed, they have proceeded to stuff it with all the farcical forcemeat at their disposal, and quite a handful of the funeral baked meats of Mack Sennett comedy.

They are energetic story tellers, the Messrs. Gabrielson and Pincus. They must have spent a lot of time watching a three-ring circus. Obviously they believe in complicating a plot until it looks as if all the bows on Topsy's matted head had been tied up in Gordian knots. But in spite of their frenetic labors "The More the Merrier" has a sullen way of resembling, for the major portion of the evening, that Mr. Pecksniff whom Dickens likened to a signpost because he was always pointing the way and never going there himself.

Again and again the new arrival at the Cort seems on the verge of entering those blessed realms of derangement which can be

one of the pleasantest features of the American stage. Toward the end of its second act and for a few moments in the hurly-burly of its third "The More the Merrier" gets tantalizingly close to its objective. But, though it knocks on the door several times and for a few seconds gets one foot inside it, it never quite crosses the threshold.

In spite of all the thyroid they bring to their plotting its authors have a hard time getting things going. When they are establishing the fact that a millionaire in his castle in the Colorado Rockies wants to be elected Govern-

or as a stepping stone to the Presidency, their story moves with the measured tread of a funeral march. When once it becomes clear that the millionaire's campaign is in the hands of a substitute press relations man the farce's pace accelerates, although it has now begun to sound like the book of scoreless musical comedy.

When the young press relations man, marooned with his associates on a snowy mountain top, is forced to raise some money to join his boss by accommodating tourists in the millionaire's castle, and a corpse is included among these paying guests, things at last are set to happen. And happen they do for some uproariously macabre moments when the aforesaid corpse on roller skates is being pushed around a setting done by Stewart Chaney, and which has enough doors to keep the Marx Brothers busy.

But what should roar like a lion squeaks like a mouse during most of the evening—a mouse that is trying to be cornered in all four corners at the same time. Even when things are at their most active, it is not a case of Helzapoppin. It is the case of a firecracker—overloaded, just a little damp, and not a giant—spluttering in response to a match.

Although Otto L. Freeminger, as director, does his manful best to apply the match, "The More the Merrier" is by far less explosive in its merriment than it needs to be. Its strivings prove only intermittently effective. Despite such players as J. C. Nugent, the lovable; and Louis Hector; a fine actor, though just now uncomfortably brassy; and Keenan Wynn (the great Ed's son), who is funniest when he does not try too hard; and Doro Merande of the droll ways; and Millard Mitchell, that wonderful human yawn; and little Teddy Hart, with those eyes and that voice which can take terror for a joyride.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 16, 1941

Boring Corpse Comedy

By HOWARD BARNES

MURDER melodrama and slapstick can be blended into an uproarious farce. You may go back before "Arsenic and Old Lace" to "A Slight Case of Murder" to prove that point. It takes extremely knowing craftsmanship to pull the trick, though, and it is exactly that which is missing in "The More the Merrier." This newest contribution to the burgeoning season, which opened at the Cort last night, is a dull and witless burlesque. Some fine players are trapped in the proceedings, but their best efforts merely accentuate the show's utter lack of dramatic imagination and zest. As some one once remarked, even the laughs are wrong laughs.

The authors of the mishap, Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus, must have taken alter-

nate whacks at the script without comparing notes. For the work starts on a note of heavy-

handed political satire, goes into the sort of comic invention which Mack Sennett did far more effectively on the screen and peters out in a dither of plot complications. Whenever a subtle farcical situation might have been established, you are given a knock-down, drag-out bit of buffoonery. The lines fizzle instead of crackling. And the characters are always ridiculous instead of being amusing.

After all, one goes to the theatre to see life recreated, no matter how cock-eyed the dramatic mirror. "The More the Merrier" has no possible connection with the stuff of living or even death. The corpse, which is dragged through a scene or two, is probably the most sympathetic figure in the piece, which should give you a rough idea of how lean it is on genuine entertainment. It for one, though, it was a dirty trick to put the stiff on roller skates in one of those madly slamming door sketches which would look sorry even as a black-out in third-rate musical revue.

Otto L. Freeminger, who is co-producer of the new comedy, has not helped matters a bit by his staging. Apparently he decided that

(Continued on page 315)

"Brother Cain"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 13, 1941

'Brother Cain,' a Gloom Drama, Opens at the John Golden Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE new theatrical season suffered a painful relapse last evening, coincident with the presentation of "Brother Cain" at the John Golden Theater. It may be expected to recover, but probably only after the amputation of "Brother Cain," which is clearly beyond treatment.

Michael Kallesser and Richard Norcross conspired in writing "Brother Cain," which gloomily discusses the woes of coal miners. Seems that three stalwart young brothers sent a fourth member of the clan off to college, expecting him to do great things when he came out. When he didn't, but just went to law clerking at \$15 a week, they were pretty annoyed and worked upon him so that he went back to the mines himself. This enabled the actors to spend the second act in the almost complete darkness of a subterranean corridor where it was pleasant to discover, the facial contortions which they had previously been undergoing were practically invisible. They all came out again in the third act,

'BROTHER CAIN'

A play in three acts by Michael Kallesser and Richard Norcross; staged by Charles Davenport; settings by Louis Kennel; presented at the John Golden Theater on September 12, 1941, by the American Civic Theatre, Inc. The cast: Mom.....Kasia Oraszewska
Pete.....William W. Terry
Hugo.....Jack Lambert
Joe.....Royal Raymond
Annie.....Anita Lindsey
Paul.....Frederic deWilde
Marion.....Martha Roberts
Mr. Tyler.....Richard Karlan
Process Server.....George Edwards

except one, who got killed by a coal-slide, and argued a good bit about a suit the young lawyer was bringing against the company. Finally he got thoroughly annoyed at their stupidity and went away, and not long thereafter the rest of us were permitted to do the same. It was very pleasant to get back to the surface again, too.

These small events are very ineptly described by the Messrs. Kallesser and Norcross, who write well below the level of competence. The acting was very forthright, rather noisy and, on the whole, extremely bad. The audience now and then aroused itself from a well-earned torpor to giggle a little.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, September 13, 1941

'Brother Cain' Opens On John Golden Stage

New Play Deals With Education and Coal Mine

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH I am personally unfamiliar with the coal miners and their problems, I suspect that the nearest the authors of "Brother Cain" have come to a real mine play is "The Corn Is Green," that well-known hit is in the playhouse next door to the John Golden Theatre, where "Brother Cain" opened last night under the auspices of something called the "American Civic Theatre, Inc." There are a couple of brick walls and the earth between.

The new drama is a grim tale of four Polish brothers and their ma, who quarrel a lot because young Paul went off to college and got what seemed somewhat erroneously described as an education.

It is by Michael Kallesser and Richard Norcross, and while Mr. Kallesser once attracted Broadway's wavering attention with a pretty bad little sex saga called bluntly, "One Man's Woman," he has not been very active since. He is, of course, only co-author of "Brother Cain," so it is unfair to blame him for everything, but if I remember "One Man's Woman" accurately, the dialogue seemed distinctly Kallesseresque.

Enter and Scrub

Quite a big part of the opening act is spent getting the boys washed up. As the brothers came wearily out of the shaft and on to the stage I thought they had been doing an amateur minstrel show.

They wash serially in a big wooden tub about the footlights and, sure enough, underneath all that blacking, actors were lurking ready to spring out at the drop of a washcloth and give a performance.

Mom and the three mining brothers are all rejoicing over the impending return of Paul, upon whom they have spent their savings. He is out of college, and they think he will make them all rich.

Then they get sore because they find he has to start as a 15-a-week law clerk, and two of the brothers wrangle with him until he goes to work in the mine, so he can earn more money and pay them back for what they spent on his education.

He even breaks off a vaguely valentine affair he has with the niece of the lawyer he was working for, and takes up some old claim he feels the family has against the mine owners for the death of his father.

Quarrel in Mine

Having quarreled heavily at home the brothers quarreled just as wildly down in the mine shaft. They quarreled over Hugo's girl, because Hugo was jealous of Paul, and they quarreled over Paul suing the mine owners.

There was a lot of talk about how the rats in the mine suspect a cave-in before the miners know anything about it, and try to warn them. The theatre boasts no such friendly service.

"Brother Cain" caved in on me so suddenly that I got to the street just in time to avoid the third act. I noticed a number of other critics trying to beat me to the exits, and I think all are safe, even after the fumes of the dialogue.

It was acted very violently and often incoherently by a small cast, and the mine scene is in darkness that is, unhappily, not quite total. My spies, left in the theatre, report that the plot came out happily enough, that while one brother was killed in the mine cave-in, the company settled for pa, and poor Paul went back to his girl friend.

Not that it matters.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 14, 1941

A Bad Break For the Miners

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BROTHER CAIN is one of those works that it's cruel to make fun of but impossible to take seriously. The authors have taken hackneyed but honorable material and, with an earnestness that is almost terrifying, mangled it beyond redemption. Their story has to do with a family of Pennsylvania coal miners. On the sociological side, it deals with the frightful conditions of the mines and the callousness of the mine owners; on the personal side, it tells of the brother who has been sent to college and comes home eager to help his family, only to be called a swelled head and to find that he can get nowhere in the face of his brothers' resentment and ignorance. The two themes are, so to speak, knitted together, feverishly dropping stitches all over the place. Once again the proletarian drama must bear the brunt of well-meaning incompetence.

Messrs. Kallesser and Norcross are fairly handicapped as playwrights, seeing that they know nothing of how to create character; construct a plot, provide atmosphere or write dialogue. Of their dialogue it is only necessary to relate that they have installed the Line of Lines, when the young lady next door says to the returning hero, "See, I have become a woman."

It took more than a wretched script, however, to achieve the particular effects of Friday night's opening. Mr. Charles Davenport's direction can best be described as violent. People made faces as though they were performing for the deaf and dumb. People shouted at one another as though they were standing on opposite banks of the Hudson. People raced about the stage as though they were trying to win the Belmont Stakes. Kasia Oraszewska, as the boy's old mother, and Frederic de Wilde, as the son who had gone to college, tried to have as little to do with all this as possible, but at times Mr. Charles Davenport managed to overrule them.

"Brother Cain"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 13, 1941

"Brother Cain," or A College Boy In Mineville, at the Golden

By WILLELLA WALDORF

AT THE Royale Theatre in West 45th Street "The Corn Is Green" stirs up considerable interest in the efforts of a young Welsh miner to win a scholarship at Oxford.

Next door, at the Golden, "Brother Cain," which opened last night, endeavors to show what happens in a Pennsylvania mining town when the youngest son of a family of miners returns from college, educated to be a lawyer, and sets about elevating the community.

Michael Kalleser and Richard Norcross have put together a confused, rambling, seemingly endless play, in which the characters repeat themselves so often that it sounds like one of those nickel-in-the-slot machines grinding out the same tune over and over. Until it runs down. Then somebody puts in another nickel, and it starts all over again. Along about ten o'clock, after a first act

lasting one hour, they changed the scenery to the gangway of a coal mine, lighted only by the lamps on the miners' caps, and put on the same record, winding up with the collapse of some of the superstructure.

Just before eleven they changed the set back to Act I (the family home), and it turned out the only person killed in the accident was the least talkative brother, Hugo and Pete, the super-dumbbells of the group, and Paul, the educated one, wrangled about whether or not to sue the company, fought over the buxom lass next door and spat epithets at one another while the simple Polish mamma wrung her hands and poured broken English upon the troubled waters, to no avail.

Finally, around eleven-thirty, the final curtain staggered down, the collegian member of the family having reached the conclusion that his brothers were just too dumb to bother with any more. Most of the audience had suspected this several hours earlier.

Our favorite member of the cast was Jack Lambert, who played Hugo as a cross between the Hairy Ape and Gargantua. He was in rare form, happily killing rats in the mine shaft, tossing ample Annie from next door on the parlor couch, grabbing a shotgun when a knock sounded at the door. . . . Hugo he bad boy. Ugh.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE September 13, 1941

New Low-Water Mark

By HOWARD BARNES

NO theatrical season is ever really launched until it turns up with a hopeful production of a hapless little drama. There has been scant waiting this autumn. "Brother Cain," which meandered about the stage of the Golden Theater last evening, is a model of inept writing and awkward interpretation. The play veers between a heavy-handed indictment of mining conditions in a small Pennsylvania town and popgun melodramatics. The players do almost nothing to relieve a sustained tedium. Some one must have been optimistic about the chances of this new stage exhibit, but the optimism was distinctly unwarranted.

What Michael Kalleser and Richard Norcross were trying to communicate in "Brother Cain" is something of a mystery. They have taken a Polish mining family, examined its various members at some length and left the lot of them as two-dimensional as paper dolls. Even when the heel of the family tries to woo a girl by taking her out in a flying tackle, it is

difficult to get excited about her fate. Even when the brother feud breaks out in the midst of a mine disaster, the show has only a touch of melodramatic excitement. As for the social significance, if any, of this new Broadway bore, you will have to look for it yourself. To my mind it has none.

Character studies can be interesting on the stage without explicit dramatic action or meaning. But they have to be a lot more fascinating than the figures which people "Brother Cain" to keep a play spinning. Since the four Kowalskis, who do most of the posturing at the Golden, are not even able to agree on a common Polish accent, the make-believe is definitely makeshift. Perhaps there is a drama to be written about a mining kid who gets education and finds that it alienates him from his background and his family. D. H. Lawrence made the theme sing with dramatic overtones in a book, "Brother Cane," when it sings, is badly off-key.

It would be charitable not to mention the acting at all. For the performances are all just a notch above rank amateurism. Frederic de Wilde, as the law school student who is bullied into taking a job in the mine again, is singularly unconvincing, even when he is appearing in the darkness of a underground shaft. Anita Lindsey is aggressive, and little more than that, as the girl who almost loses a battle of the sexes. Jack Lambert, as the Cain character of the play, is explosively ineffectual, and the other members of the company talk dull talk in a dull manner. At least "Brother Cain" is all of a piece—bad play, bad acting and bad production. The new season has quickly hit a low-water mark.

Announcement

The Critic for the New York World-Telegram
is now

John Mason Brown

The Critic for the New York Post
is now

Willella Waldorf

"Brother Cain"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 13, 1941

'Brother Cain,' Drama Of Mines and Miners, Is Full of Coal Dust

"Brother Cain," drama by Michael Kallessler and Richard Norcross. Produced by American Civic Theatre at the John Golden Theatre, New York, Sept. 12, 1941.



By BURNS MANTLE

TO TELL you the story as it was told to me in "Brother Cain" at the John Golden Theatre last night, Paul was a coal miner's son with an urge for learning. With the help of his hard-working brothers he wangled himself a college education and then went back to the mines to help his family.

And what did Paul find? He found that his old Polish mother still worshipped him; that his stupid brothers hated him; that the little girl next door had become a grown up woman with a Lana Turner profile and that it took a lot of courage for a college man to stick with his Polish family in a Pennsylvania coal town.

Paul Sticks

However, Paul did stick for awhile. Long enough to bring suit against the company under a New Deal compensation law, hoping to collect for his father's death.

The suit wasn't going too well at the end of the play, having got Paul's brothers fired and his mother about to be dispossessed. But Paul was pretty sure of a favorable settlement.

This is another of those well-meant social dramas that have little more than an idea to sustain them.

It was written by Michael Kallessler and Richard Norcross, Mr. Norcross being credited under his own name of Lawrence B. Wallis with a professorship at Mt. Holyoke College.

It has been given a fairly crude staging by Charles Davenport and is played by a willing company that stood up manfully to its words and its direction before last night's frequently tittering audience.

Working Cast

Kasia Oraszewska plays the mother with more feeling than she deserves. Jack Lambert and William Terry growl enthusiastically as two of the brothers and Frederic de Wilde suggests possibilities as a clear-spoken juvenile.

Some pains have been taken to supply real hot water for the smudged lads to wash their faces in, and a scene in a mine shaft might have been effective if the authors could have left out the phony coal and tapped a vein of convincing drama.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES,
September 13, 1941

Keep Out of the Mines

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER dutifully listening to three acts of "Brother Cain," which was acted at the John Golden last evening, a thinking man is likely to give up any idea he may have had about adopting coal mining as a career. For "Brother Cain" insists that coal mining is dangerous, coal miners are hot-headed and stupid and coal mining companies are heartless. As a matter of fact, this may not be the half of it, chum, but it is the gist of what Michael Kallessler and Richard Norcross have to say about it, including two intermissions long enough to get through all the regular Broadway gossip and on to some outrageous variations.

Eleven halcyon years have elapsed since Mr. Kallessler was last discovered operating in these parts. At one time he was our most unrelenting playwright—author of highly individualized items like "One Man's Woman," "Rockbound," "Live and Learn" and "Trial Marriage," which he frugally offered a second time under a finer title. Up to last evening Mr. Norcross's record had been a clean one, apart from the rumor that he is really Lawrence B. Wallis, an English and drama instructor at Mount Holyoke College, who is now studying drama the hard way.

Under Charles Davenport's unbridled direction, the performance is like a visit to a starving zoo. If the run goes on much longer, hungry actors will be devouring plump members of the audience. An exception must be made in the case of Kasia Oraszewska, a sweet-faced Polish woman who could act a part if she could find one, and has no reason to be voracious. Frederic deWilde is not a bad lad either, and Martha Roberts is good-looking.

It happens, there is a more sensitive play about coal-mining at the Royale Theatre, which is next door. It is entitled "The Corn Is Green," and Ethel Barrymore is in it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 13, 1941

Mine Play at Golden Produces No Nuggets

Coal Gas in Brother Cain Chokes John Mason Brown at Premiere

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH The Corn Is Green is next door at the Royale, some of us found ourselves down the wrong shaft at the Golden last night where Brother Cain, another mining play, was opening. Opening? I, for one, guess closing.

If not last night, then soon, but without arousing that sympathy created by most mine disasters. Because even pick in hand and with a miner's headlight to steer one by, it would be difficult to dislodge any virtues from the dark vein of dullness represented by Michael Kallessler's and Richard Norcross's drama about some Pennsylvania bohunks.

In certain respects Brother Cain is as much like all the other indifferent mining plays I have ever seen as one lump of coal is to another. Of course, the foreman is a bully. Of course, father has been killed in the mines

before the first curtain goes up. Of course, there is a threatened strike, and one young fellow comes near to getting his family dispossessed when he defies the wicked company. And, of course, the rotten timbers in a

gangway collapse, thus causing another death before the evening is over.

Three Disappointed Brothers

But to my knowledge only the Messrs. Kallessler and Norcross have succeeded in bringing these old materials to the surface in a script permeated with quite as much coal gas as is Brother Cain. Their play can claim little merit or excuse. To be sure, they have tried to vary the pattern.

There is the story of how three uneducated brothers treat a fourth brother they have shaved to send through law school when he returns home making less money than they do.

One of these brothers—needless to say, the nice one—soon gets killed in the mine. Another is a snivelling cripple. And the third, though more of an amorist than Gargantua, is a figure Toto alone might find interesting.

Mother Gets Wise

After much bickering above and below ground the young lawyer does win some money from the company, and the authors permit his hard-used old mother to come to the conclusion (reached at 8:55 by the audience) that her other sons are dumb.

The wisest—certainly the most enviable—characters in Brother Cain remained unseen, although they figured prominently in the dialogue last night. They were the mine rats who, realising disaster was at hand, were supposed to be running—not walking—out on the show in the second act. The wiser of my Brother Rats followed their example.

"The Wookey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, September 11, 1941

'The Wookey' a Crowded Drama Of the Bombed and the Brave

"The Wookey," drama by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan. Produced by Edgar Selwyn at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, Sept. 10, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I THINK you may have to pick your drama out of the debris at the Plymouth. "The Wookey" is a pretty sizable order for one small stage, and it is so crowded with atmosphere and a carefully planned realism that it is not easy to get to the heart of it.

It is a little like peering through fire and fog at an animated picture that you are eager to see because of the great importance and emotional values you have read into it.

American Author

And like listening to a description of it carried a little nervously above a rumble of confused sounds. The sounds are not all of the war. Most of them spring from the adventures of the bombed and battered, but others are associated with a scramble for accents and dialects and the home life of London's brave "little people" who took all that a ruthless enemy could pile upon them last Fall and came through the ordeal wondering and defiant, but amazingly true to their heritage.

"Mr. Wookey" is an American playwright's tribute to these little people, as he has reason

to believe he would find them if he were to go to London.

It may be he had made the journey, and that he found them as pictured. But I have an uneasy feeling that when the war is over and the British get down to writing their own story of the war-time lives and reactions of their people their dramas will not bear too close resemblance to this one.

This, I'd say, is the work of a sympathetic stranger bent on extracting an effective stage story from the adventures of a battered people, rather than such a first-hand report as Cedric R. H. wrote into "Journeys' End" out of the first world's war.

As the first of the current war dramas this

one is interesting and fairly spectacular. The scenic effects that Jo Mielainer has produced, helped enormously by sound recordings made on the spot, I'm told, by the British Broadcasting Studios, are pretty sure to keep an audience sitting upright and expectant and a little apprehensive.

Hears the Call

The story, stripped to its simpler lines, is that of a rebellious tugboat captain who resented Britain's muddling approach to war and wrote his protests to 10 Downing Street. When no attention was paid to his letters by the high command he determined to have nothing to do with the war. Let his silly old England shift for herself.

Then came Dunkerque and the call for help. The Wookey was drawn in. He made seventeen crossings in his tugboat and brought her back loaded with the rescued every trip. They arrested him for a petrol bill when it was over, but he was able to adjust that. And when they bombed his castle, and killed his wife, and told him what else they were going to do, he sent his family to the country, strapped on his cartridge belt and went out to meet Jerry face to face.

Edmund Gwenn, a pleasant memory from "Laburnum Grove," plays the Wookey with perfect timing and perfect characterization. He is helped notably by Carol Goodner, Heather Angel, Norah Howard and a generous number of American actors with English comedy experience.

Edgar Selwyn made the production for Metro, and will probably remake it as a picture. He will have less fun but more success, I suspect, when he gets it into the studio.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, September 11, 1941

The Wookey Is a Fairly Effective War Play

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT is peace, not war, which as a rule has brought forth the best war plays. It is peace because the great war plays have been against war, as men can be when, having removed its causes, they are able to take the long view and in the calm freedom which they, or others, have earned for them reflect upon war's wastefulness.

In times of stress, melodramas—such a one for example as last night's The Wookey—are apt to prove serviceable enough. Literature can wait; the world's righting cannot. Like many other war plays produced in the dark hours of conflict,

Frederick Hazlitt Brennan's saga of how a Cockney tugboat captain rallies to Britain's defense, having first opposed both the war and the government, is one of those plays, which, though skeletonized by the author, is given its truest flesh and blood by the hates and fears and hopes we all bring to it.

If before the evening is over The Wookey reaches out for most of us, at this moment or at that, as surely as a roasting fork does for a marshmallow, it does so because Mr. Brennan has been wise enough to write his melodrama about the "little men" of England. Our only surprise and regret is that when he has dragged us through the fire, we do not come out more completely scorched than we are.

Mr. Brennan's tugboat captain is The

Wookey of his title; Wookey because this happens to be his name; but "The" Wookey because he is a man of authority; a genial soul, a god to his family, a patriarch who takes himself and is taken seriously, a sage to the waterfront. It is Mr. Brennan's shrewdest strategy to have as his hero a Britisher who throughout is a critic of his government; the kind of free thinker who, though he works days and nights on his tugboat to help evacuate his country's stricken soldiers from Dunkerque, will sail there at the outset only to save his brother-in-law. It is Dunkerque, his own ruined home, his broken family and the Luftwaffe's bombing of London that make Mr. Wookey reach for the end of his anti-aircraft gun. When a man such as The Wookey does this it really means something.

If Mr. Wookey was wrapped up in bunting from the outset, it would be harder for most of us to put up with what is always uneven and sometimes downright tedious in Mr. Brennan's writing, especially in his disappointing last act. But undisturbed as is his script, it benefits not only Mr. Brennan's subject and his focus but also his sense of humor.

He has an eye for character—the kind of eye which the readers of Mr. Priestly who have never read Dickens describe as Dickensian. He may write with a lack of reticence which seems more American than English, but he is wise enough to underscore and heighten his disasters with laughter.

What really makes his play as effective as it often is the production it has been given. Its best dialogue is frequently the work of those \$15,000 sound effects which Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has supplied to suggest the horrors of London in wartime. The Wookey is that kind of play, genial as it is at the outset, gallant as are its intentions throughout, and genuine, if easy, as is the emotional impact of its theme. Jo Mielainer's settings, which are fascinating in their details and admirably realistic, are also valiant contributions. So are the players Robert R. Sinclair has well directed and, on the whole, cast happily.

Carol Goodner as the strip-teaser turned canteen worker, Heather Angel as Wookey's shell-shocked daughter, Norah Howard as his adoring wife and Horace McNally as a peppy and much-loved Irishman and out from a large cast. But the best protector Mr. Brennan's script has from its shortcomings and the surest guarantor of its virtues is Edmund Gwenn. Mr. Gwenn is a fine, thorough actor who as the Wookey gives a charming, heart-warming and very moving performance. Although the play he distinguishes could—and should—have been better than it is, more often than not he makes it seem good enough.

"The Wookey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 11, 1941

'The Wookey,' a Moving War Play, Opens at the Plymouth Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FREDERICK HAZLITT BRENNAN has created one stubborn, gnarled English tugboat captain to typify the dogged courage of the little people of London and has made him the hero of a play. The play, called "The Wookey" after its central character, was presented last night at the Plymouth with a great roaring of sound effects and, rather more importantly, a great deal of human poignancy. It is an absorbing, moving play, and sporadically rather more.

Now and then, that is, Mr. Brennan strikes a fire which has nothing to do with the brilliant pyrotechnics—very literal pyrotechnics on occasion—of the staging. Now and then, and particularly in the last fine scene, he makes you feel some of the terror and gallantry which mingled a year ago this month in London's ordeal by bomb. The rest of the time he gives you what is, essentially, a touching play about a salty character, and gives Edmund Gwenn the opportunity to build that character into solid reality.

Mr. Wookey is a determined and confident little man and a benevolent family despot. At the start of the play he will, forthrightly, have nothing to do with a war into which the leaders of an empire from which Mr. Wookey is seceding have bungled their people. Mr. Wookey is a free man, and takes nothing from anybody, and minds greatly if everybody doesn't know it. He takes his tug to Dunkirk, but on a purely family mission, planning the rescue of his wife's sister's husband. But he stays to chug for four days through the hell of Dunkirk. And then his boat is libeled for the petrol bill. This does not endear the Government to Mr. Wookey, and he writes a letter to Mr. Churchill about it.

Mr. Wookey never approves the Government entirely, and he will never follow meekly. He is not a meek man, little Wookey. They

libel his house down, and kill his wife, and he endures and slangs the Government and goes doggedly about his business of being an air raid warden. They can't drive Mr. Wookey out of London, they can't make him quit, they can't make him meek. And in the last, magnificent scene, little Mr. Wookey, in rubber boots and an iron hat, climbs up out of the basement which is all the bombs have left him. He carries a machine gun too big for him and is strung with ammunition belts. And he leaves behind a radio blaring the pompous threats of a German announcer in Paris. Mr. Wookey stops and stares at it and climbs on up, and the chances are he'll be killed. But London, Mr. Brennan is saying, as all the civilized world has been saying in one fashion or another, must be full of Wookeys.

Mr. Brennan has introduced other characters, some of them salty too but all a little savorier as compared with The Wookey himself. He has invented some plot complications, none of much significance, and his story has little forward thrust. There will no doubt, and as time goes on, be war plays of greater impact; plays which will catch more consis-

'THE WOOKEY'

A play in three acts by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan; staged by Robert Sinclair; scenery designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner; presented at the Plymouth Theater on September 10, 1941, by Edgar Selwyn. The cast:

Ernie Wookey	George Sturgeon
Aunt Gen	Carol Goodner
Mrs. Wookey	Norah Howard
Primrose Wookey	Heather Angel
Constable Simpson	Henry Mowbray
Walt Gibbs	Neil Fitzgerald
Edmund Gwenn	Edmund Gwenn
Rory McSwiggan	Horace McNally
Cousin Hector	Victor Beeroff
Mr. Archibald	Byron Russell
A. R. P. Warden	Roland Bottomly
Dr. Lewisohn	Everett Ripley
First Boy	George Wilson
Second Boy	Gilbert Russell
Third Boy	John Moore
First Girl	Grace Collins
Second Girl	Cora Smith
The Vack Lady	Olive Reeves-Smith
The Curate	Sean Dillon
First-Aid Man	Harry Sothorn
Messenger	Allen Shaw
Subalters	Gilbert Russell
Colonel Glenn	Charles Francis
Navvies	Milton Blumenthal
German Radio Announcer	Allen Shaw

tently the picture of human gallantry which in "The Wookey" flickers a little. But Wookey himself will be a hard man to forget.

Credit Mr. Gwenn's acting with part of Wookey's special quality—it is fine, first acting. Credit Heather Angel with a nervously intense portrait of a frightened daughter, Norah Howard with a deeper than surface study of Mrs. Wookey. Carol Goodner is excellent as a breezy aunt who is made over by war and there are many admirable small bits, including one by Horace McNally and another by young George Sturgeon. There's a very nice dachshund in it, too.

Jo Mielziner and his technical assistants have made it exciting to watch, and the roar of planes, the whistle of bombs and the wall of sirens have a most authentic sound. If you want a thought to take home with you, you can remember that these are recordings made in London. Presumably that screaming bomb you hear really burst.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, Thursday, September 11, 1941

Edmund Gwenn Acts a Cockney Tugboat Skipper in Frederick Hazlitt Brennan's New Drama of Wartime London, Entitled 'The Wookey'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MR. BRENNAN does not have much to say about freedom in his gusty war play, "The Wookey," which was acted at the Plymouth last evening. But he illustrates it with great relish in the absurd and indomitable figure of a Cockney tugboat skipper, and freedom seems like a vital thing. For Mr. Wookey of the London dock area is a family man with remarkable notions of his importance as a British citizen, and he refuses to have anything to do with the war until it is dumped into his lap.

Since Mr. Brennan has a rowdy sense of humor and the gift of gab as a story-teller, his drama of bomb-blasted London is at once comic and admirable—the heroics sketched in off-hand style, the gallantry reduced to homely terms. Edmund Gwenn, who once acted here in Priestley's "Laburnum Grove," plays the part of the plucky skipper with warmth and dry-humored swagger. Probably there has never been a person like Mr. Wookey outside of story or fable. But probably there should be, for he is the ideal man of freedom and a lovable person to have stumbling about the stage of a theatre.

Oh, how respectable he is! As a waterman he has risen from garbage to metals, and is now master of his own vessel. Out of regard for his swift social advance, he is founding a Wookey family line according to British tradition; and as head of the family he arranges marriages and guards the rights of succession. As a free citizen he wrote to the

government some years ago his views of the way to stop Hitler. Since his advice was ignored, he washes his hands of the whole mess when war breaks out. But "The Wookey" is the story of how he is drawn into the war by family interests, how he makes trip after trip to Dunkerque to carry off soldiers, how his vessel is libeled by an oil corporation for the cost of fuel used in this mission, how he writes a dignified letter to Churchill to protect his rights as an individual and how he concludes by pitting character and body against Nazi ferocity.

If you want to be petty, you can pick flaws in "The Wookey." The Wookey pose gets transparent occasionally. There is a strong dash of hokum in Mr. Brennan's method of attack. There is considerable bathroom humor, which is distasteful to this column's sense of what is funny and what is stupid. But these things hardly matter against the

honesty of Mr. Brennan's feelings about the value of a free man in a shackled world. Some of "The Wookey" is terrifying, for they have brought over a sound track of bombing noises and the flare of a flaming sky. Above the wreckage, screaming and carnage rises the sweetness of an absurd little man who believes in the importance of what he is doing and does it.

As the man of dockside affairs, Mr. Gwenn plays with just enough sentiment to win your affection and just enough iron to command your respect. Norah Howard plays the part of the anxiously respectable wife with remarkable skill, never forgetting a significant detail; and Carol Goodner gives a hearty sketch of a member of the family who loves bawling and revelry. As the daughter whose nerves are shattered by the bombing, Heather Angel plays with a complete intensity. George Sturgeon also does well with the slippery yet well-meaning part of the Wookey heir. Horace McNally as a belligerent Irish suitor, Henry Mowbray as a haughty constable, Olive Reeves-Smith as a patronizing official, Everett Ripley as cheerful neighborhood physician add to the color of a lively performance under Robert Sinclair's direction. Jo Mielziner has had a good time designing respectable interiors and grotesque ruins for scenery.

Mr. Brennan has found a fresh and human approach to a subject that has rubbed good many noble words bare of meaning. Although the cause is a sublime one, he has not forgotten that the work of war is done by human beings. He has done his in the same fashion—without malice, some mischief and a good deal of deference to honest valor.

"The Wookey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, September 11, 1941

A Noble Cockney

By HOWARD BARNES

OUT of the terror, the suffering and the fortitude of present day London, Frederick Hazlitt Brennan has written a fine and moving play. "The Wookey," which opened at the Plymouth last evening, is both challenging and craftsmanlike. Written with eloquence and understanding, and played superbly by Edmund Gwenn and his supporting company, it gives the new theatrical season distinction and excitement. Edgar Selwyn, who came back from Hollywood to present the production, has done a painstaking job; Robert Sinclair has used all his directorial cunning on the staging and Jo Mielziner's sets and lighting are triumphant.

There are apt to be those who will call this show a piece of sheer propaganda. If it is, it is certainly well worth seeing and hearing across footlights. For Brennan has stuck faithfully to his subject. Very simply, he has tried to show what happened to the little man in England between the blundering pre-war period and the magnificent, stubborn civilian defense of last year. He has done so with deep sympathy, understanding and artistry. The large dramatic background of his subject matter tends to give it ringing overtones that may not stem from the play itself, but he has kept the work human and inevitably right.

Nothing could be more right than the character of Horace Wookey himself, a tugboat captain, who will have no part of the war until the evacuation of Dunkerque and then

throws the full weight of his thinking, feeling and action into the conflict. It will be a splendid season, indeed, if we are offered a more lovable and heroic figure. He can damn the government and the military high command at one moment and accomplish feats of courage at Dunkerque in the next. He can rule his family in their little East End house with a benevolent tyranny and yet see to it that the Wookeys will carry on in the ultimate cataclysm of the drama. Here is the great little man of England brought to vivid and unforgettable dramatic life.

The author is only partially responsible for this. His Wookey is consummately conceived, but it is Edmund Gwenn's magnificent performance of the role which contributes authority and fire to the drama. He has given

fine performances of small roles on the screen recently. If the theater is wise, it will never let him go again. This is no mere character study. Gwenn acts with such passion and conviction, that he is more than the tough little Cockney scow captain, clearing up the rubble of his bombed house, arranging the hair of his shattered wife, blasting a colonel for not giving the docks more protection and keeping his whole district from getting the wind up. He is the embodiment of that stubborn courage and freedom of thought which has made England's defense of democracy an epic chapter in the history of mankind.

There are times when there is no drawing the line between a memorable portrayal and the play which frames it. Certainly "The Wookey" is at its finest when Mr. Wookey is dominating the action. Brennan has other characters—some of them exceedingly good. He has made the most of air-raid melodramatics. There is some amusing commentary on the part of the Irish in the war and there is some lively comedy. Without the staunch and moving performance of Gwenn, though, the play would not have its present stature.

The cast is uniformly excellent. Norah Howard contributes a knowing bit as the proud and dauntless wife of Wookey. Carol Goodner is superb as her happy-go-lucky sister, whose husband is killed in France. Then there is Heather Angel, who is colorless at the start but has some fine scenes as she struggles against hysteria after being bombed in a munitions factory. Horace McNally plays the excitable Irishman who worships Wookey with power and George Sturgeon is splendid as the Wookey boy. All the players have been guided expertly through the scenes by Sinclair, and the Mielziner effects are stunning. The new theatrical season got the sort of jolt it needed last evening.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, September 11, 1941

'The Wookey' Opens At Plymouth Theatre

Edmund Gwenn Plays Title Role in Drama of London Air Raids

By JOHN ANDERSON

WITH superb sound effects recorded during a London air raid, an excellent view of a bombed house from the scenic studio of Jo Mielziner, and a heartily warm and endearing performance by Edmund Gwenn, "The Wookey" revealed at the Plymouth last night three undeniable assets. As a picture of a Cockney steamboat captain turning his wrath slowly from the British Government to the Nazis it is naturally gallant, often amusing, and in one scene of hellish destruction, both horrifying and touching.

The fact that it is almost as sentimental as Bainsfather's tribute to Britain's last world warrior, "The Better 'Ole," and the further fact that it is full of ripe old humor and dubious humor are bound to taint this critical report with modified rapture.

I would like to go all out for it, but find too many spots where it left me all in. There were moments indeed, of such exaggerated reticence that I was reminded of Mr. Bert Lahr's celebrated burlesque of "Chin Up" and if Auntie Bea Lillie had raised her little finger anywhere in it I fear I would have come down with Mr. Mielziner's brilliantly collapsible scenery.

Stoic Stubbornness

For the author, Frederick Hazlitt Brennan, has tried so carefully to show the stoic stubbornness of the British under fire, that he

has made them theatrically untheatrical. He has tried so valiantly to capture for his play the casual heroism of "Journey's End" in civilian terms that some of the scenes come perilously near to dwindling off into irrelevance. In substance and in writing the play doesn't seem to touch the level of its material.

But it satisfies, of course, a powerful curiosity in its realistic details of an air raid, and in its central character Mr. Brennan has created a highly entertaining codger, gruff, tender hearted and unconquerable. He is old John Bull, with a heart of gold and granite. He severs his personal diplomatic relations with the Empire because he considers Downing Street a mess of blundering fools, and when he takes his tugboat to Dunkerque he wants it understood that he is go-

ing strictly for his brother-in-law. The fact that he brought back large sections of the British Expeditionary Force which, as he said, seemed to be in some trouble, had nothing to do with it, even if they did give him the George Cross for civilian gallantry.

Sees Wife Slain

But Hitler was finally too much for him, and Mr. Wookey went to war in earnest. He saw his wife killed and his home wrecked; he listened to the quarreling around him, scorned the Nazi radio harangues, and took up his arms. At the end he is lumbering up the steps of his cellar shelter with a machine gun.

In spite of its effective passages the tale somehow doesn't release the swelling emotion it ought to. Perhaps the immediate knowledge that people are living and fighting and going on through such slaughter outweighs anything the author has been able to add to the picture. Perhaps we are too close to the events for any man to get suitable dramatic perspective, or do more than scratch the surface of the theme.

Edgar Selwyn has given the play an excellent production and under Robert Sinclair's resourceful, vividly effective, and mechanically perfect direction the staging and performances are admirable. Mr. Gwenn presents an altogether delightful portrait of the Wookey, with gusto and humorous relish and a sincerity which carries even the most sentimental passages along in a powerful and deeply felt performance.

Glimpse of War

The others are generally good, notably Carol Goodner, Norah Howard, Heather Angel, and Horace McNally—the last as a somewhat confusing Irishman in a portrait none too steadily drawn.

Since the play is as close, I hope, as New York will ever get to an air raid it affords a glimpse of civilian war that should fascinate the sight-seeing playgoers in the safety of a theatre, but this recommendation still leaves the regret that "The Wookey" isn't, at the same time, a better play.

"The Wookey"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 11, 1941

"The Wookey," a War Drama, Opens at the Plymouth Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

"THE WOOKEY," Broadway's first drama of Britain under the Blitzkrieg, arrived at the Plymouth Theatre last night.

Frederick Hazlitt Brennan, the author, has looked over the battle map and put his finger on London's East End dock area as the scene of action, focusing his attention in particular on the home of Horace Wookey, a Cockney tugboat captain, and his family. He is thus able to send "The Wookey" and his tug to help rescue the British Army from Dunkirk, and then proceeds to bring the war into the Wookey parlor and basement as the Luftwaffe pounds the Thames waterfront into a heap of rubble.

Edgar Selwyn, the producer, has stated that some \$15,000 of the large amount spent on the play went for sound effects, and the program notes the fact that the terrifying noise of German bombers coming over, as well as the shrieks of the "Alert" and "All Clear" sirens, were recorded in London by permission of the British Ministry of Information.

Bombers Over London

It is these horribly realistic sounds, combined with the scenic and lighting effects provided by Jo Mielziner, that make "The Wookey" a production deeply impressive to American audiences. Mr. Selwyn's technicians have made it possible for Broadway theatregoers to experience the sensations of a group of Londoners standing in their own parlor while the bombers roar overhead and trees spring up in the curtains and furniture.

The next attack brings The Wookey's house down around him and sends his family burrowing into the cellar. The rage that rises and boils over among the dock workers and their neighbors as their homes disappear and their families are killed or maimed

is the theme of Mr. Brennan's play. He traces the change in Horace Wookey's sentiments from exasperation and disgust at the muddling methods of the British government to a stubborn determination to resist Hitler to the end.

The stage blitzkrieg at the Plymouth strikes so violently that it is, perhaps, just as well Mr. Brennan's writing of "The Wookey" is not equally realistic. His dialogue, though an occasional line comes through with brilliant effectiveness, is, on the whole, undistinguished and elaborately theatrical. The sound and the scenery of "The Wookey" ring devastatingly true, but we found it difficult to believe wholeheartedly in Mr. Brennan's Cockney family group or, in fact, in his people in general. And perhaps, as we said, it is just as well. If the play itself were on a par with the production, the emotional impact of it all would be well-nigh unbearable.

Edmund Gwenn's Performance

In The Wookey himself, Mr. Brennan has created a character designed to show what the British Empire is made of, an East End patriarch who rules his family as a benevo-

lent autocrat, writes letters to Winston Churchill telling him how to run the war, deplores the blunders of bureaucracy, refuses to run away from Hitler, and finally goes out to battle the blitzkrieg alone with a machine gun as a German radio announcer shrieks from a loud speaker urging the English to yield before they are annihilated. A nation of Wookeys, it is obvious, will never be blotted out by a thousand blitzkriegs.

Edmund Gwenn plays the role beautifully, doing much to gloss over by his own lovable personality the fact that the character is curiously unfocused and that his speech jumps maddeningly from good old waterfront Cockney to theatrical flights of oratory. Mr. Brennan seems to have made his people in general somewhat hifalutin. They talk, more often than not, like stage puppets, and the earlier part of the play, in particular, before the sound and fury begin, presents a family that smells distinctly of grease paint.

In this difficult situation, the cast struggles with varying degrees of success, revealing accents that come and go like the tides. Heather Angel, though she seemed a bit too genteel even for the daughter brought up as a lady, gave an excellent impression of terror and hysteria under fire. Carol Goodner rang true more often than not as Aunt Gen, who was no better than she should be, but had a heart of gold. Norah Howard as the mother, George Sturgeon as the juvenile of the house and Horace McNally as the Irish cynic who finally caught the war fever after fighting everybody but Hitler, did their best with the material provided, and Robert E. Sinclair managed the production details with considerable ingenuity.

Sounds and Scenery

It is, however, to the sound technicians and to the scenic effects that "The Wookey" owes its claim to distinction, and it is beyond all doubt a powerfully effective picture of London under fire. The fact that Mr. Brennan's drama seems at times to be a play about London by one who has never been there has curiously little effect on the production viewed as an attack on the emotions.

No wonder the Ministry of Information cooperated in the making of the sound track. "The Wookey" is, among other things, one of the most effective pieces of anti-Hitler propaganda New York has yet experienced.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 11, 1941

There'll Always Be a Mr. Wookey

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ARTISTICALLY, *The Wookey* is a very bad play, but it can hardly miss. It comes at the right moment, and it speaks in the right cause. Its cockney hero is almost blatantly picturesque and cantankerous and brave, and has to see his house blown to bits and his wife killed before he throws in his lot with the British Government he has despised and upbraided.

Its humor is fairly pungent; its pathos is emphatic. It cuts through to the undying tenacity of the British people without any old-fashioned flag-waving; and if all that is not enough, its cast is skilful and its \$15,000 worth of sound effects provide a vivid taste of what London is like during a bombardment. The movies will do a handsome job of it, but this one should suffice for now.

The Wookey has nothing to contribute, in a serious sense, to the war; its characters and situations are all made-to-order, and not always well made at that. But the war has a great deal to contribute to *The Wookey*. It not only gives it timeliness; it gives to its over-contrived, sure-fire stage types a dignity that they themselves far from deserve—a dignity that springs from the fact that millions of people who share their lowly way of life have, in the real world, gone through similar experiences and endured similar dangers, in that sense, rather than in the manner it keeps playing to the gallery, *The Wookey* is good propaganda.

There's very little story; the play has chiefly to do with the gradual change in Mr. Wookey's attitude toward the war. A cocky little man who operates a tugboat and is against the government, he lashes out at its stupidities and follies and refuses, as late as Dunkirk, to fall in line. But as his sufferings pile up, so does his anger; the evils of the Tories fade out compared to the evils of Hitler; and when he is smitten hip and thigh, he makes his choice.

Mr. Wookey, as a symbol, has his points; as a character, he is just one more of those racy cockneys with a head of brick and a heart of gold who, while expressing the doggedness of the British common people, always betray its sentimentality as well. His wife is the Woman Who Looks Up to Her Husband; his sister-in-law is one of those strumpets who, in a crisis, rather outdo Joan of Arc; and so on. They're all old stuff, but they keep things brisk and they have their propaganda value.

The cast seized on all its comic and dramatic possibilities. Edmund Gwenn played Mr. Wookey skilfully and sympathetically for all he was worth. Carol Goodner was

good as the sister-in-law and Norah Howard even better as the wife, Heather Angel, as the Wookey's young daughter, came nearest to being a disappointment. Jo Mielziner's sets and lighting are properly effective.

'THE MORE THE MERRIER'

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

(Continued from page 308)

a murder melodrama could be made gay in the theatre by staging it at a staccato clip. He has set up a presto tempo and rarely lets it lag, but it is a tedious jig which results from his ministrations. Since there are very few situations that even have a touch of slapstick excitement and no good dialogue to speak of, he probably had no choice in his handling of the work. Anyway, "The More the Merrier" is not only a boring bit of make-believe, it is frenetically boring.

The larger company that appears at the Cort deserves one's sympathy rather than one's censure. Such able comedians as Frank Albertson, Grace McDonald and Keenan Wynn do what they can to give gusto to the show, as they encounter over-night guests, a dead man and a scrammy Colorado politician in the politician's Rocky Mountain castle. Millard Mitchell and Teddy Hart try to squeeze out laughs by over-playing, as the lads who are responsible for the corpse. It is not the best recipe for comedy. The players didn't have a chance though, with the grotesque ineptitudes of "The More the Merrier."

"Village Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, September 4, 1941

Frank Craven Stars In 'Village Green'

New Play About Life in New England Opens at Henry Miller's Theatre

By JOHN ANDERSON

FRANK CRAVEN and son John are back at Henry Miller's Theatre in a play about life in a New England village, and at that point the similarity between "Our Town" and "Village Green," which opened last night, ends pretty violently.

Where Mr. Wilder reached some cosmic overtones Carl Allensworth keeps his feet firmly on the ground. His play doesn't get much nearer New Hampshire than Grand Central Station; its earth is, I fear, the pavement of Broadway and the rolling green hills are, let us hope, in the box office. It is as blandly transparent as a glass clock striking 12, with all the works outlined in Neon lights, but it is amiable, folksy, shirt-sleeve comedy that does exactly what is expected from moment to moment.

Anybody surprised by its plot would probably chase a mechanical rabbit and yet Frank Craven touches it with the beaming warmth and simplicity of his open faced humor which can make life seem so true, on such occasions, to the theatre.

Faces Trouble

Mr. Craven plays with all the humor trade-

marked homespun, a small town judge who is a perpetually unsuccessful candidate for State Senator. In the midst of the campaign his opponent dies, and just when things appear rosy for him he runs smack into a second act full of the dandiest misfortunes that ever got a good guy down.

He quarrels with a political boss, loses his best client, and then faces a town scandal because a lovesick painter has put his daughter's face on the naked figure of a goddess in a new mural for the town hall. By the end of the second act poor old Homer W. Peabody

seemed to have every known trouble except athlete's foot, but it was perfectly obvious that, with any sort of gods in Heaven or the box office, everything would come out all right.

With a photographer from "Life" as a sort of *Deus ex Machina* the judge routs his enemies, gets back his best client, sees the young painter acclaimed as a genius, his daughter's reputation whitened, and his supporters just clamoring to get to the ballot boxes to put him in office. Not since the miniature trolley car with twinkling lights last rolled down the backdrop in a swirl of happiness and prosperity at the end of "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" has everything seemed so complete for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Affable Humor

If it were not for Mr. Craven's ever-endearing performance all this would doubtless seem impossibly fabricated. But such is the star's affable humor and ingratiating manner that even the deepest blemishes on an up-right New England character, are easily covered. He can whisper a line into a laugh, and shrug it into a yawn. He can breathe what looks like life into a character that otherwise appears to have been cut rather broadly from the funnypapers.

The others under Felix Jacoves' direction, are generally good at the routine assignments of small town comedy—the usual types, the timid business man with the bullying wife, the village prude, the sanctimonious bigot, and the town sot. John Craven plays the young painter admirably, and there are amusing smaller sketches by Joseph Allen, Laura Pierpont, and Norman Lloyd.

Though everything is easily expected, it is unexpectedly entertaining, proving, I suppose, that when it comes to durability New England granite is no better than Broadway hokum, which is eternal.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, September 4, 1941

Frank Craven Opens the New Season by Appearing in Carl Allensworth's 'Village Green'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THANKS to Carl Allensworth's "Village Green," which opened at Henry Miller's last evening, a new theatrical season has begun and Frank Craven is back on Broadway. Although a new theatrical season is worth counting among life's frugal blessings, it does not outrank the best pants-pocket actor in the business. Cast in the part of a backwoods New Hampshire politician, Mr. Craven is giving one of his shrewdest and most likeable performances, full of a hundred folksy tricks and suffused with homely good nature.

As for Mr. Allensworth's first Broadway play, it is an old-fashioned comedy that verges on farce and almost runs down like a tired grandfather's clock in the second act. It is as complicated with small-town intrigue as an AAA soil improvement program. But an actor never gives a richly comic performance of nothing. Credit Mr. Allensworth with inventing the part that helps Mr. Craven to be so amusing.

According to the plot, he is Judge Homer W. Peabody of North Oxford, N. H., which seems to be somewhere in the Hanover region. As a Democrat in a hardwood State, he is only a matter of political form. Over a period

of sixteen years he has run for the State legislature, nine times unsuccessfully. The author of "Village Green" gives him considerable political assistance by rigging an election that turns on a sensational nude painted in a mural at the town hall. It is a local scandal; and with the assistance of Mr. Allensworth, who draws his characters in black and white and whisks them about like a busy stage director, it is a scandal that turns into political victory.

All we have to consider is the bearing this vaudeville sketch has on Mr. Craven's acting. The bearing is a true one. Mr. Craven slides, shuffles and peers his way through a good acting part. Whenever he has to costume a

part, Mr. Craven merely pokes around inside his old clothes closet. If he does not happen to have a pipe to point with, an old pair of spectacles suffices. Probably he has to buy that poke collar and the bow tie that goes with it. But after pushing his fingers through what hair he has left on his head, he is ready to go out there and tickle the customers with quiet mummery.

Like any practical comedian, he is best when things are going against him. When he is artfully trying to conceal from his wife a bit of political chicanery, his innocence is irresistibly guilty and his slight voice is full of honey. When the election seems to be going against him, his voice almost disappears; his weariness and hopelessness are humorously grotesque. You should see him pour soup down that sore and hoarse throat. It is just one more pain added to all the others that are racking him. For Mr. Craven, who works inside the small compass of character parts, is a subtle and winning comedian. He has found a hackneyed part that he knows how to translate into a quizzical holiday.

Like the play, the staging is routine. Laura Pierpont acts the part of the sagacious wife with a refreshing personality. As the love-crossed daughter, Perry Wilson gives a most engaging performance; and John Craven, who is shaking some of the rough edges out of his acting, does well by the part of the rebellious village artist. Calvin Thomas and Matt Briggs are in there roaring and Joseph ("What's all the shootin' for?") Allen is grimacing as usual. Norman Lloyd has a small part as a socially-minded photographer for Life.

"Village Green" is no great shakes as a play. But glad to see you back, Mr. Craven!

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 4, 1941

The Season Opens On an Old Theme

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"VILLAGE GREEN" came along last night to open the season, and the only real trouble with it is that it's the kind of thing that opened the season

about 20 years ago. It's a pleasant enough bit of small-town hokum, with a very nice part in it for Frank Craven, who's a very nice actor; and all in all it may very well earn its keep until better things come along. But aside from being magnificently untrue to life, it's a little thin and more than a little familiar.

The gist of it is Mr. Craven, who has merely been carted a few miles down the road from Our Town to a less favorable New England community, where he appears as a kindly judge who is running for state senator. He has run eight times before and, being a Democrat in New Hampshire, has never been elected nor hoped to be. But during his ninth campaign things happen. First the Judge gets tangled up with the rich man of the town, who is also its villain. Next the Judge gets into trouble by defending the Town Hall's new murals, one of which contains nothing less than a naked woman. He even goes on defending them when he discovers that the

woman's face—though only the face—is that of his daughter.

There are naturally two-and-a-half acts of commotion before the town swings over to the judge's side on Election Eve, and his daughter and the daring young muralist are united, and the rich man is brought to his knees. There are also some nice laughs and some decided *longueurs* and some tinnily playing-to-the-gallery remarks about the principle of freedom of expression involved in the Town Hall scandal, and some plot twists that anybody who has ever been to a theater can foresee half an act in advance. There's almost everything in the play, in fact, except something new. It's a good deal more of a village graveyard than a village green.

Frank Craven remains Frank Craven throughout, which means that he's thoroughly human and engaging and just right in the part. His son, John, was likable as the painter, while John Ravold was amusing, and Henry Jones very amusing, in smaller roles. The rest of the cast was not very impressive.

"Village Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, September 4, 1941

'Village Green,' With Frank Craven, Starts the Season at Henry Miller's

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A SMALL, confiding play called "Village Green" came out of the summer circuit last evening to Henry Miller's Theater, wagging its tail and asking to be liked. No one will, I suspect, have the heart to rebuff it sternly, if for no other reason than that Frank Craven is in it, giving a performance so beguiling that it would arouse affection for a much less engaging play.

And there is nothing wrong with Carl Allensworth's "Village Green." It is, to be sure, sometimes easy-going almost to the point of immobility and never attains a pace much above a jog. It is a character study in an older manner; its characters are almost without exception lovable and its humors are of the homely sort. It will slip from memory quickly, but there is no harm in it and it has a pleasant flavor.

It is concerned with a good New Hampshire justice of the peace who wants to be a State Senator and who has a daughter who is in love with a young man who is painting murals in the town hall. The incidents are numerous but Mr. Allensworth's chief story is of the furor created by one of the murals. The artist, in symbolic mood, painted a noticeable nude as one of his central figures. Absent-mindedly, he applied to the figure the face of the Justice's daughter.

Much came of this and the town was riven. Clergyman was parted from clergyman. A

rival political leader tried to take advantage and it was a long time before he got his comeuppance. Life Magazine came around to take pictures, freedom of expression reared its sainted head and the daughter almost married the wrong man. But everything came out beautifully right in the end, fortune showered her best gifts on the deserving during the last act.

Mr. Allensworth has written this with affection for his conventional characters. Mr. Craven acts the part of the justice with an easy confidence which probably comes in part from his own knowledge that he is doing precisely the right thing at every moment—mak-

'VILLAGE GREEN'

A comedy in three acts by Carl Allensworth; staged by Felix Jacques; presented at Henry Miller's Theatre on September 3, 1941, by the Olneya and Mr. Jacques. The cast: Judge Homer W. Peabody... Frank Craven Zeke Bentham... Joseph Allen Margaret Peabody... Laura Pierpont Harriet Peabody... Perry Wilson Jeremiah Bentham... John Craven Henry Ames... Matt Briggs Hubert Carter... Henry Jones The Rev. Horace Shurtles... Calvin Thomas

Walter Godkin... John Ravold Harmony Godkin... Maida Reade George Martin... Joseph E. Garry A Boy Scout... Julian Olney, Jr. The Rev. Arthur McKnight... Frank Wilcox Dawson... Norman Lloyd

ing the most of all the quiet humor, bringing every lurking chuckle from the script and filling in every crevice of the author's character outline. It is a rare pleasure to watch Mr. Craven work as he is working in "Village Green."

He is, sometimes a little too quietly, supported by several good actors. Henry Jones enlivens the part of the girl's wrong suitor, John Craven is attractive and bright one. As the daughter, Perry Wilson plays attractively, and contributions are made by Frank Wilcox, Matt Briggs, Joseph Allen, Laura Pierpont and several of the others. None of these threatens Mr. Craven's easy mastery of the situation; from first to last it is his evening. It is a comfortable evening, free from the slightest hint of strain or purpose, restful on the mind.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, September 4, 1941

Frank Craven Appears in "Village Green"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WITH the same warmth, the same simplicity, the same cracker-barrel wisdom, and the same tender geniality that he played the Stage Manager in "Our Town," Frank Craven returned to Broadway last night to open, the season officially with "Village Green."

Like "Our Town," "Village Green" is laid in New Hampshire. And like Mr. Wilder's memorable script, Carl Allensworth's little comedy has Frank Craven as its star. Thereafter all similarities between the two plays come to an abrupt end. For where Mr. Wilder's drama went bravely on its way as a beautiful and imaginative morality play about the small things which loom so large in the growing up, the marrying, and the dying of all average people, Mr. Allensworth's comedy chugs and backfires along a well-worn road like an automobile of the "Get-a-horse" period.

Its spirit is amiable. Its first act is pleasant

enough. Even thereafter good lines from time to time brighten the action of a darkening text in the fitful manner of lightning bugs on a summer night. But its saga of how a small town judge finally triumphs over his political enemies, and is going to be elected Congress-

man after fighting the cause of freedom in terms of a nude hung in the town hall, somehow seems, both in its contrivance and its telling, too old-fashioned and too familiar for genuine comfort.

In spite of the excellence of Mr. Craven's performance, in spite of his complete rightness for the part and his fine eye for detail and for humanizing values, "Village Green" appears to be more dusty than diverting. Mr. Craven is given admirable assistance by his son, John, as the young painter; by John Ravold as a soft-voiced villager; and by Henry Jones, who is very funny as a spineless suitor. But the play in which Mr. Craven finds himself, and to which he lends the constant interest of his presence, is no help.

Although its dialogue has its moments which are both sagacious and amusing, its plot gives the impression of having been retrieved rather than written. In 1915 all of its predictable twists would probably have struck one as being more amusing than they do at present. Just now they seem tame. Well-meaning, mind you, and harmless enough, but tame; regrettably tame, notwithstanding Mr. Craven, who deserves a superior script and acts "Village Green" just as engagingly as if he had found a good one.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE,
September 4, 1941

Mild Comedy-Drama of Yankees Opens Theater Season

THE drama season of 1941-42 opened officially last night at the Henry Miller Theater with a homey, mild comedy-drama, "Village Green," the work

of Carl Allensworth, who understands the folk up New England way, their Yankee manner of thinking and their internecine quarrels. In fact, the author probably had Frank Craven, who hasn't been seen in legitimate fare since "Our Town" three years ago, in mind when he wrote his script. The role of Judge Homer W. Peabody, a Democrat in Republican New Hampshire running for office after nine defeats, is right up Mr. Craven's alley. Here is the judge, kept in the strait and narrow by his wife, attempting to win a seat in the New Hampshire Legislature without resorting to political chicanery. Finally the judge's opportunity comes, but not without the aid of situations which manage to keep a thin plot above water for three acts.

At the close of an election campaign, Judge Peabody is offered the support of the Republicans because of the death of his opponent, provided he casts his vote for the right road contract. He promises to do so, but his wife points to the evil of his way. From there the author picks up the artist-suitor of his daughter,

who is painting murals for the town hall. The action of the artist, played convincingly by John Craven, involves the judge in a controversy of nation-wide consequence, when a picture magazine decides freedom of speech is being threatened by the town elders. Mr. Allensworth is at his best in taking up the cudgel for the free expression of the painter against the bigoted antagonism of North Oxford's regimented churchgoers. The Yankee humor and moral environment are both heart-warming and timely.

The producers, Dorothy and Julian Olney and Felix Jacques, have chosen their cast carefully. Mr. Craven, of course, is on home ground, assured and winning. The first actor of the season to come up with a surprise performance is Henry Jones. He plays the role of a political boss' stupid nephew with such aplomb as to convince you that he is some one you know. Frank Wilcox, the Methodist minister, adds another memorable role to his credit. It is certain that the producers benefited by the tryout of the play this summer at White Plains. The entire cast is good. The drama season starts off creditably, if not in a blaze of glory. J.P.